

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 04838 231750Z
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SUBJECT: UNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES FOR MARCH ARE "SPRING
TONIC" TO EMPLOYMENT SECRETARY

REF: LONDON 3169

1. THE GOVERNMENT HAS WELCOMED THE LATEST UNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES RELEASED MARCH 22 BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT FOR THE PERIOD COVERING THE MONTH UP TO MARCH 12. THESE FIGURES SHOW THAT UNEMPLOYMENT DROPPED FOR THE SECOND CONSECUTIVE MONTHLY PERIOD -- THE FIRST TIME THIS HAS OCCURRED IN NEARLY THREE YEARS. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EMPLOYMENT ALBERT BOOTH TERMED THE NEWS A "SPRING TONIC".

2. THE NUMBER OF REGISTERED UNEMPLOYED FELL BY 38,045 TO A TOTAL OF 1.38 MILLION. THIS REPRESENTS A REDUCTION OF 2.67 PERCENT FROM THE FEBRUARY TOTAL, WHICH ITSELF REPRESENTED AN IMPROVEMENT OVER PREVIOUS MONTHS. THE SEASONALLY ADJUSTED TOTAL OF ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE UK WAS 1.32 MILLION, A DROP OF 10,300 (0.77 PERCENT) FROM THE FEBRUARY TOTAL. THE NEW FIGURE REPRESENTS 5.6 PERCENT OF THE LABOR FORCE -- THE SAME PROPORTION AS IN FEBRUARY.

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PAGE 02 LONDON 04838 231750Z

3. SEASONALLY ADJUSTED VACANCIES ALSO ROSE DURING THE MONTH, WITH THE CURRENT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED TOTAL OF 157,300 WHICH IS AN INCREASE OF 6,800 OVER THE FEBRUARY FIGURE. THIS, TOO, WAS ENCOURAGING NEWS, SINCE IT REPRESENTS THE HIGHEST TOTAL RECORDED FOR A 21 MONTH PERIOD AND, IN THE VIEW OF A NUMBER OF OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT SOURCES, MAY FORESAKE AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE

ECONOMY. AT THE VERY LEAST, IT PROVIDED A LITTLE BOOST TO LABOR GOVERNMENT MORALE ON THE EVE OF ITS CRUCIAL CONFIDENCE VOTE IN THE COMMONS.

4. REACTION FROM THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT WAS MUCH MORE PRUDENT. TUC GENERAL SECRETARY, LEN MURRAY, DECLARED THAT THE CURRENT FIGURES DID NOT REDUCE THE NEED FOR A REFLATIONARY BUDGET TO STIMULATE EMPLOYMENT, ALTHOUGH HE ALSO EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE FIGURES DID HERALD THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE RECESSION. THE LONGER TERM OUTLOOK, IN FACT, MAY BE LESS ENCOURAGING. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS SUGGEST THAT AN ADDITIONAL 300,000 JOB SEEKERS WILL ENTER THE LABOR MARKET, WITHOUT A CONCOMITANT INCREASE IN THE GROWTH RATE TO ABSORB THEM. (THESE CHANGES HAVE LED SOME COMMENTATORS TO PREDICT AN UNEMPLOYMENT LEVEL OF AROUND 1.5 MILLION BY THE END OF 1977.)

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